Armor Takes Flight

Abrams Tanks and Bradleys Catch a Hop Into Kosovo

by Captain Marshall Miles

An M1 from C Co, 1-35 AR, is seen chained down to the deck of a C-17 as the unit prepares to fly from Albania to Macedonia, enroute to Kosovo. –Author Photo

This article describes the experiences of Co. C, (the Flying Coyotes) during their operations in Kosovo. The author shares his feelings and insights as he takes his company, on very short notice of less than 48 hours, from its base camp in Albania. The unit loads its tanks on aircraft and flies into Macedonia, then road marches into war-torn and bombed Kosovo. – Ed.

On 13 June 1999, Co C, 1st of the 35th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, the "Flying Coyotes," entered the Kosovo region of Yugoslavia. The Coyotes were the first tank company in theater, and represented the entire heavy armor element of the 2-505th ABN BN, 82nd Airborne Division. When we received orders to march into Yugoslavia, C66 led the march north and was the first American vehicle into Kosovo. The overall task force consisted of one mechanized infantry company — Co D, 1st Bn, 6th Infantry from our brigade in 1AD — and three light infantry companies from 2-505th.

Three light airborne companies with one tank company and one mechanized infantry company made for a very unique, yet potent force. It was a part of the overall American contribution to the Kosovo effort, which also included the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). They followed the Army contingent by 24 hours into Kosovo. The 2-505 basically occupied the south and west part of the American sector and the 24th MEU occupied the east and north.

Albania, and later Kosovo, posed many challenges for a tank company operating independently from its parent battalion. We received superb support from the infantry battalions to which we were attached, but we still had difficulty with two major issues: parts and people. One of our main problems was maintaining our tanks in a very austere environment with a very difficult logistics trail back to our home station in Baumholder. Our second major issue was dealing with the UCK (KLA) rebels who were trying to establish themselves as the main force in the region.

Given these two major themes, this article will attempt to give commanders some tips on how to operate in theaters similar to Kosovo. This article will be broken down into the following topics:

- Conducting a change of command while deployed
- Deploying tanks by air
- C/1-35 AR's road march into Kosovo
- Establishment of AA Bondsteel
- Force protection
- Mounted patrol in Kosovo
- Winning the hearts and minds
- Family support groups

Conducting a Change Of Command While Deployed

Before entering Kosovo, C/1-35 AR was deployed to Rinas Airfield, Albania, where we were part of the force protection package for Task Force Eagle. The primary mission was to guard the airfield, protecting the AH-64s that were stationed there during our air war against Serbia. At this time, C/1-35 was cross-attached to the Regulars of TF 1-6 IN.

I deployed to Albania on 21 May 1999, and was scheduled to take command of the company on 2 June. By the time I arrived, the Coyotes had already been in Albania for about 30 days. Morale was an issue, due to the hostile climate and the stationary nature of the mission. Tankers are, as a rule, creatures that yearn to *maneuver*. Keeping them tied to a muddy airfield to guard Apaches was not an enjoyable mission. The soldiers guarded the airfield from watchtowers along the eastern perimeter. Because of the hopelessly muddy soil conditions, the tanks were not permitted to move without higher authorization. Those that were not parked as stationary posts on the perimeter were parked in a very crusty "motor pool" that resembled the surface of the moon.

The most difficult part of conducting the change of command inventory in that environment was finding time for the soldiers to lay out their equipment. Thus, I had to work around the guard schedule and inventory equipment tank by tank. The outgoing commander did a great job trying to get me extra time to inventory the equipment, but was very constricted by his everyday mission. In spite of this difficulty, we managed to inventory roughly three tanks per day. The actual inventory on site was not very difficult, but we also needed to reconcile hand receipts for equipment left behind in Baumholder. This equipment included computers, various tools, and other miscellaneous items that the Coyotes did not bring to Albania. Fortunately, I had an excellent supply sergeant, SGT Thomas Langone, who came to the company about two weeks prior to the company's deployment, replacing a non-deployable soldier. SGT Langone was an extremely meticulous NCO who would not allow me to sign for anything that was not properly inventoried or reconciled prior to his deployment.

Deploying Tanks By Air

Prior to the change of command, events in Albania had been moving at a fairly steady pace. We had been rapidly building a base camp that could be used for defense or as a staging base for future operations. The change of command took place on 2 June 1999. The ceremony was

a quick one, and following that, events took a rather rapid turn. That evening, at an emergency command and staff meeting, the 1-6 IN commander, LTC Embrey, gave us the warning order to be prepared to deploy by air to Camp Able Sentry, Macedonia, in 36 hours!

This warning order, however, did not relieve us of our responsibility for manning posts on the perimeter. Being the only tank company was a daunting task: we had to prepare the company to deploy by air while still accomplishing the current mission. We basically had to use sleep time to prep the vehicles. The men were on an eight-hour guard shift rotation, so we used their downtime to prepare the vehicles. The result was that the men got very little precious sleep.

This was when we discovered, again, that being a part of a large operation leads to a great deal of frustration. The order to "go" changed hourly. Since we were literally the "tip of the spear," the order to deploy the company was being directed at the top of the national level. Thus, one hour we would be told "go," and four hours later we were told "stay." At least twice, we conducted a complete relief in place of our sentry positions, pulled off the perimeter, only to be sent to the perimeter again.

We finally received the word, and on 7 June, we pulled off the perimeter for good. All of our tanks went through an all-night, makeshift pre-deployment processing center (DPC). The tanks were given a pre-Joint Inspection (pre-JI), weighed, and balanced at the DPC station.

Several tanks broke down because they had not moved in over a month. Our mechanics worked long and hard to get them repaired in time to deploy. We tore down the tents that we had been living in and slept outside on our vehicles. Fortunately, during this entire time, our tanks were fully uploaded with ammunition. Not having to draw ammunition during this stressful time period saved us an enormous headache.

After the DPC stations had been completed, we were told to "stand down" — we were not going anywhere. Instead of re-erecting our tents, we received permission to remain sleeping on our tanks until further notice. This also had the effect of preventing us from moving back to the perimeter. This was a wise decision, because on the morning of the 9th, we were again given the word to "go." Again, we went through the DPC and the pre-JI process. We then lined our tanks up at the airfield and waited for the Air Force C-17s to arrive.

The C-17 is a wonderful aircraft. They are exceptionally easy to load and unload, once you have completed the Joint Inspection and have enough plywood. However, the exact requirements for loading the M1A1s had never been worked out between the Air Force and the Army. While we were lined up at the airfield, there was a lot of confusion as to what the *exact* requirements were to load tanks on the C-17s. We spent a great amount of time determining whether shackles were required for loading. Basically, they are not — the C-17 is a self-contained loading vehicle — they carry everything you might need to load and tie down the vehicle, except the plywood, which protects the deck of the airplane.

Giving the word to "go," then "stop," then "go, go now" was extremely frustrating for the soldiers. Morale boosters, such as making the troops stencil a symbol of a flying tank on the left side of their turret and authorizing them to name their tanks and stencil the names of their tanks on the right side of the turret were effective. The rule was that they would receive one set of wings for each flight and that when we got to Macedonia, we would paint on a second row of wings. Names such as "Lina's Revenge" (my tank), "Checkmate," and "Bounty Hunter II" greatly increased morale and gave the soldiers a sense of ownership and pride, and linked us to the tank heritage of the past. My outstanding first sergeant, Steve Lamb, also greatly boosted morale by ensuring the very last thing torn down from our tent quarters was the phone — the soldiers' only link to their families back in Germany and the United States. Morale was very, very high by the time we began actually loading our tanks on the planes.

Road March into Kosovo

The flight from Albania to Macedonia took approximately 30 minutes. I was greeted by American and French transportation officers who guided us from the airfield at Camp Able Sentry (CAS) to the vehicle holding area. I also met the head PAO, CPT Marty Downie. I attempted to build some kind of rapport with him because I knew that this would be a historic event. Fortunately, our arrival had been planned for several days. MAJ O'Neal, the transportation OIC, had even pre-measured and painted marks on the ground showing exactly where each tank was to be staged. As each tank flew in, I ensured that each tank crew was greeted by an officer or NCO in the company who guided the men to the living area. Just *being* out of Albania, combined with the outstanding mess hall at CAS, was a tremendous boost to morale.

We were now cross-attached to 2-505th Airborne, under the command of LTC Anderson. That night, we had our first staff meeting. We were told that we would follow on behind British forces in five days. Intelligence was very limited at that time. We were still not sure if and to what extent the VJ (Vojnska Jugoslavia - Yugoslav National Army) would comply with the terms of the peace treaty. Thus, we planned for the worst. The S2 perceived our biggest threat would be from snipers and mines. The S2 also told us to expect a number of VJ soldiers to stay behind in Kosovo dressed in UCK (KLA) uniforms. Lastly, the S2 recommended to us that we stay road-bound until the engineers declared our operating areas mine-free.

At approximately 2000 on the night of 11 June, LTC Anderson asked me if I could be prepared to make the drive into Kosovo by *midnight* of that night! This was a direct response to the surprise entry of Russian forces into Kosovo. This created an immediate need for NATO forces. I informed him that I could move by 0600 the next morning if we worked through the night.

There was a reason for the delay. The M88, the medic and maintenance M113s, and my first sergeant had not arrived yet. In addition, we did not have any communication support. Finally, planning at that point was very haphazard. Our task and purpose remained unclear.

That night, after quickly briefing my PLs and PSGs, I got my men out of the tents and we slept on our tanks in preparation for the possible road march, but the road march never happened on that day. The next morning, on 12 June, LTC Anderson informed us that we would not go that morning, but we would SP at 0800 the next morning. This was a great relief because it would give time for my 1SG to arrive with the last of our soldiers. It also gave the staff at 2-505 more time to plan for the mission.

That night, we received our mission. Basically, C/1-35 would be the advance guard for the charge into Kosovo. As we marched overland, A/2-505 would fly in by CH-47s and UH-60s. We would link up with A Company at the proposed AA, known as AA Bondsteel. On our maps, Bondsteel was drawn in as a 3km x 3km "goose-egg" east of the city of Urosevac.

An M1 moves up the road near Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. Photo: SFC Garry H. Bleeker

We would be following close on the heels of a British Ghurka Regiment. I put out my OPORD at about 2200, but not many men got sleep that night. We were too busy sewing flags on our uniforms. This was a last minute change that came down prior to the LD, but one that had many unintended consequences. We were not *allowed* to wear our flags in Albania but it was a *requirement*, by the terms of the Peace Treaty, while in Kosovo. This requirement cost the company precious hours of sleep.

The morning of the 13th, stand-to and PCIs were at 0500. I gave the men a *very* detailed safety briefing to include all ROE that I had been given the previous night. I explained to them the seriousness of the mission and told them that British troops had received sniper fire the previous day and that the Germans had come under mortar fire. We left right on time at 0800. The order of march was my tank, followed by 3rd Platoon, 2/1-6 IN (cross-attached from D/1-6 IN), 1st Platoon, the 1SG with the company trains, and the XO's tank brought up the rear.

Our first destination was Skopje, Macedonia. I set the road march speed at 30 KPH, but we had to adjust it going through the city. People lined the streets of Skopje. A few threw flowers and a few threw rocks, but most people just stood in awe. The first problem occurred when a roll of concertina fell off of C13 and got tangled in the fuel and brake line of the PLL 5-ton truck. It cut the fuel and brake line very badly and it had to stop. C65 and the XO, 1LT Mike Mitchell, stopped to provide security. We paused for 15-20 minutes while the mechanics TI'd the damage to the truck. It couldn't be repaired quickly, so the company drove on. The tool-truck and some mechanics stayed behind to assist in repairing the truck's lines. Soon afterward, C14 broke down as well. But the company moved on.

On our way north, we passed by a huge refugee camp near Orman, Macedonia [EM300578]. We stopped to refuel just south of the Macedonian/Serbian border (south of the Serbian town of Djeneral Jankovic.) That's when we first came under attack — not by Serbs but by the media. CNN was the first to approach us. They wanted to put a camera crew on my tank to film our entry into Serbia! I was very reluctant, but agreed to do so. So, as we crossed the border (after a 30-60 minute halt to refuel), CNN was on my tank filming the whole event. Although we understood the need to support the media, they were a major distraction from our ability to focus on the mission. We were on a national-level mission to liberate Kosovo, yet the media was treating the whole affair like some kind of victory parade. It was very hard to stay focused.

From Djeneral Jankovic to Kacanik (a distance of 10km), there were a series of very long bridges and three tunnels that we had to pass over and through. I dropped off the CNN crew at the base of the first bridge. There, a British Ghurka Regiment held us up for 30 minutes. They were uploading on CH-47s to continue the march north. When crossing the bridges and going through the tunnels, I would cross over or go through first and provide far-side security. Then we would bound, usually a section at a time, to the far side. Piece by piece, bit by bit, we got through the Lepavac Valley to Kacanik. At one of the bridges, we picked up a camera crew from NBC. I did not consider them nearly as professional as the CNN crew, but tried to both stay focused on my mission and handle the media with extreme care. The NBC crew dismounted at Kacanik.

After Kacanik, the road march picked up speed. Our next stop was S-E of Urosevac, vicinity EM 890156. I picked that location because it was relatively far away from any towns where I believed snipers might be positioned. [I was also concerned about mines, but, fortunately, the British marked the known mine locations along the highway *very, very* well.] At that spot, I sent out my quartering party. Since LT Mitchell (XO) was still far back in the rear taking care of C14 and the PLL truck, I decided to lead the quartering party myself. It was now about 1800, and I was concerned we wouldn't get the AA set up before sundown. The quartering party, therefore, consisted of C66, C12 (the plow tank), D23 (a Bradley), and C33 (both NBC vehicles.)

Establishment of AA Bondsteel

When we got to Kacanik, A/2-505 flew in overhead to the proposed AA site on CH-47s and UH-60s. I linked up with the A Company commander on the road north of the proposed AA site. Neither the A Company CO nor I knew the best place to put the AA. We had been given the Bondsteel "goose-egg" on our graphics, but nothing more than that. We were very concerned about mines. After doing some map recon, we chose a spot at the junction of two dirt roads. We decided to form a triangular shaped AA, because it would be the easiest to defend and the easiest for me to plow (thus, quickest to put in.) It was also on some relatively decent high ground.

My first major challenge for setting up the AA was dealing with the media. An NBC camera crew had inadvertently set up a *roadblock* at the entrance to the AA. "We can't move now… we just set up a satellite link-up with London and we go live in 5 minutes," NBC replied. Needless to say, this created a great deal of anger. We had less than two hours of light left, had two companies to get in, the main body was on the middle of highway E65 6-7 km away, but the media was not at all concerned about our safety or our mission. After conferring with 2 Panther 6 (LTC Anderson), I granted them 30 minutes and then we

were going in. Thus, we didn't begin plowing until about 1900 (with one hour of sunlight left).

That night, SSG DeMeo of C12 and his crew plowed at least 3000m of earth in 2-3 hours with a partially operable plow (plow's motors wouldn't work to lift the plow and he couldn't use the moon brackets to safely keep the mounting pins in place.) The mine plow is not designed for this purpose, but turned out to be an excellent piece of kit. SSG DeMeo also pounded pickets into points along the perimeter where I wanted each of the vehicles. We did not put chemlights on the pickets because we were extremely concerned about light discipline.

One thing I didn't think about was the effect on the dismounts. I choose to put the AA 1.5 km away from where A Co's dismounts were. So, the A Company CO had to make his men hump uphill to the AA with all their 100-lb. rucksacks on their backs. I felt miserable for those guys. They didn't start moving in until 2000, just as the sun was going down. At about 2100, I raced back to the main body to lead in the company. Since time was extremely critical, the platoons received their AA instructions on the move. 3rd Platoon and one section of M2A2s would take the western perimeter. 1st Platoon and the other section of M2A2s would take the southern perimeter. The trains and my tank would consolidate in the center. By about 2200, the whole company was moved in. I set security at 50% for the night, wake-up at 0500, and stand-to at 0530. A/2-505 took the N-E perimeter. Though these great airborne troops were extremely tired, they greatly appreciated C12's ability to plow up a safe area for them to set up, free from the worry of mines.

At about 2300, LT Mitchell was finally close enough to be in FM communication with me. He was south of Urosevac and had the now-repaired PLL truck, the M88, and the tool truck with him. (C14 was left behind in Macedonia near the refugee camp at a British UMCP.) Since he didn't know the route in, I had to go back out of the AA to pick him up and lead him in. Once again, the media got in the way. After a heated discussion with their man in charge, I decided to go around them. I justified this by believing that any mines I hit would cause much greater damage to them than us. At about 2400, I finally got linked up with LT Mitchell and brought him safely into the AA. Thus ended our first, very historic, very long day in Serbia. Camp Bondsteel was established.

Force Protection

Our mission was to secure the town of Kacanik. Kacanik is a natural urban, mountain fortress. It is located at the mouth of the Lepavac River valley; if you control Kacanik, you control the southern route to Macedonia. It is not a good place for tanks. We had reconned it earlier the week prior. We knew we couldn't even get our tanks into the center of the town. I decided to set up the company in the town's abandoned high school.

The school was an excellent HQ and place to house my men for several reasons: it was on a hill outside, but overlooking, the main part of the town; it was surrounded by a high fence; it had running water inside (though not potable); it had good stand-off range for any would-be terrorists; and it had plenty of rooms to house my men. Occasionally, it had working electricity, and it was near the main highway. No one could enter the town without going past the school under the watchful eyes of my rooftop sentries. I felt that if relations with the UCK turned ugly, we could defend ourselves well from there. For added security, I posted two M2A2s outside the main gate of the school and two on some high ground between the school and the main highway.

Developing a security plan for my tanks was a more vexing problem. Kacanik is divided by a creek that spills into the Lepavac River on the edge of the town. I could not get my tanks safely across the bridge crossing the creek because it would carry only about 25 tons. The only place I could park my tanks was on a concrete parking lot in an abandoned factory, which turned out to be a good location because it was where the creek and the river joined, partially surrounding us with a natural "moat." The concrete lot would be a great place to conduct maintenance and was only 200m from the school.

The force protection plan for our "motor pool" was developed by my XO, LT Mitchell. Like 70% of my company, Mitchell had served in Bosnia and understood the nuances of force protection. He surrounded the entire area with concertina. One man would stay with a tank at all times. My maintenance team housed themselves in the maintenance bays of the factory. Mitchell then lined up the tanks parallel to the maintenance bays and facing the gate to the factory (our exit). It became SOP for each tank to spin its turret at a 90-degree angle with the gun tubes facing the apartments across the creek. The crews and guards would sleep under the bustle rack and drape their tank tarps down to the ground. Thus, when not conducting maintenance, any would-be snipers could not see our soldiers *and* they could also exit the motor pool with relative speed. Pointing the gun tubes towards the apartments across the creek in full view of the Kacanik citizens also created a very intimidating image.

Mounted Patrols in Kosovo

Those unfamiliar with the Balkans state that it is not tank country, that it's too mountainous for tanks, and too wooded for tanks. This is only true to an extent. Much of Yugoslavia has difficult terrain for M1A1 operations. This is true in parts of Kosovo. But Kosovo is not *nearly* as mountainous as Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia. It is interspersed with mountains but, like most of Serbia, is covered with fertile farmland. Geographically, southwestern Kosovo is a beautiful land and a good place for tanks. We took our tanks where no one ever dreamed the Abrams could operate. Operating in the mountains was often very frightening, but the expertise and bravery of our tank commanders always showed through. I am proud to say that even under difficult stresses, we sustained only one injury, a sprained ankle that one of our mechanics received when he fell off a 5-ton truck.

Working for the light fighters of the 2-505th ABN was a great joy. Though the men of the 82nd Airborne did not understand the nuances of mounted warfare, we never had a problem operating with them. LTC Anderson's leadership style was very, very decentralized. He gave commanders his guidance, assigned us an area of responsibility, and left it up to us to develop the situation and accomplish our mission unrestrained by strings from higher headquarters. We were not required to give battalion overlays of our routes of march or alpha rosters of the men we were taking on patrols. If we were having trouble with a local UCK "warlord," he would rush to the scene and put them in their place. He guided us to strictly enforce the terms of the Military Technical Agreement between KFOR and the UCK. Setting this tone early may have been a contributing factor to our sector being the quietest zone in the country today.

We conducted the majority of our patrols north of Kacanik, between the Kurkulica and Samok mountain ranges. Our area of operations extended approximately 15 kms north of Kacanik and the Narodimka Valley, 9 kms in width. Since this was a wide area to cover, I

broke down our AO into three sectors: south, east, and west-northwest. We patrolled the W-NW and eastern sector the most, because that's where the majority of the Serb peasant farmers lived. By now, most of the remaining Serbs were very old men and women who posed no threat to the Albanians.

A mixed tank/Bradley section was given a different sector to patrol each night. Each patrol usually consisted of one or two tanks and one or two Bradleys for a total of three to four vehicles. The tanks would lead, followed by the Bradleys with dismounts. Since we were short dismounts, we developed creative ways to increase our dismount strength, including using the maintenance M113 with armed mechanics, a squad of engineers in an M113, and conducting joint patrols with the 18th Polish Airborne Battalion. The leader of the patrol would choose his own route within his sector. I would lead a section every other night. I gave the patrol leaders guidance, based on our own intelligence gathering, of which villages we needed to dismount in and patrol by foot. I also gave guidance to rush to any area whenever we saw a fire beginning.

The Poles began joint patrols with us on the first of July. They were mounted in their air-droppable Honker 2324, which is a four-wheeled vehicle that could contain up to six dismounts in the rear. It was an interesting sight to see M1A1s in the lead, followed by two Honkers and an M2A2. Though this was completely non-doctrinal, it got the job done.

Within the town of Kacanik, we conducted three dismounted patrols daily, one before noon, one after noon, and one at night. Each day, we varied the exact times of the patrols. As mentioned earlier, everyone, to include medics and mechanics, participated in these daily dismounted patrols of the city because we had so few dismounts. It turned out to be a great morale boost for soldiers who do not normally conduct these types of missions. Additionally, it prevented us from "burning out" the dismounts of our attached infantry platoon.

Albanians began burning Serb homes about two days after we took over Kacanik. Most of the fires started about 2100. Thus, we conducted the majority of our patrols at night, beginning at 2000. When the arsons began, the Albanian villagers became more suspicious of us. A few times we received fire. I am quite certain that this fire was from elements in the UCK. Like many renegade bands in the Balkans, they would always talk very tough, but back down quickly when threatened. Overall, we captured 14 renegade UCK members and confiscated about 36 weapons of various type. I cannot say how many arsons, lootings, and robberies we prevented by our nightly patrols, but I am quite certain that the sight of M1A1s in remote villages made a huge psychological impact on the people of Kosovo.

"I am quite certain that the sight of M1A1s in remote villages made a huge psychological impact on the people of Kosovo..." An M1 keeps an eye on things from its position on a Kosovo roadside. Photo: SFC Garry H. Bleeker

Winning Hearts and Minds

Winning the hearts and minds of a local populace is a key to successful MOOTW operations. It revolves around demonstrating to the local populace that you are a neutral official willing to assist them and their needs. It is important, because you are an armed foreigner on their native soil.

My experience in Croatia taught me that Balkan culture creates masters at passive and creative resistance. In order to prevent this type of resistance, you must persuade them to work with you, and not against you. This is particularly difficult in the former Yugoslavia, stemming from centuries of animosity between various ethnic groups. But the Balkan culture often reflects the concept that, "I won't do anything for you unless I have something to gain by it… if you take something away from me, you must give me something back in return." If you violate this cultural axiom, you will not only cause unrest, but it could get you killed!

Team C, 2-505 ABN used three methods to overcome this cultural barrier. First, we demonstrated very visually that we were now in charge, and any issues at all had to come through us. Second, we tried to be as helpful and as courteous to the villagers as we possibly could. This helped us gain critical intelligence and find pockets of resistance. The fact that I spoke Serbo-Croat was extremely helpful as well. Finally, we met with the UCK leaders and laid down the law over what they could and could not do. This three-pronged approach worked for us, and is important if you are going to tame a larger populace with a much smaller armed force.

Balkan people respond very well to symbolic acts. The first thing we did in Kacanik was raise the American flag over the school. Its mere presence demonstrated to the people the Americans were in charge.

Usually the Albanian villagers were friendly and helpful. They viewed us as liberators and would shower our tanks with flowers, cherry branches, and bitter tasting Yugoslavian "Partner" cigarettes. When we dismounted, we asked them a series of questions to include: Where do the Serbs in this area live? Who is the leader of the village? What party does your leader belong to? Are there any suspected mass grave sites in the area?

Where are the mines? Where is the unexploded ordnance? These questions demonstrated to the locals that we cared about them, and was a vital necessity for gathering intelligence.

We quickly learned from the locals the areas that were free from mines and areas that were not. Mostly, mines were laid on

"No unit that understands force protection goes anywhere without tanks. Tanks will comprise a central element in any force package for stability operations...."

the top of hills and along the sides of roads. UXO was *everywhere.* It was clearly evident that the U.S. Air Force rained bombs on this country. Some hit enemy vehicles, some destroyed Albanian tractors, and some did not explode at all. The fact they were everywhere heightened our awareness and gave a new importance to the plow tank.

I was particularly fortunate because I could speak with most Kosovar Albanians in Serbo-Croatian. They were stunned to learn that the "Comandante" could talk with them in their native tongue. Even after we received translators, I still made a point of talking with the locals in Serbian whenever possible. However, I also explained to them that I had learned "Serbian" while serving in Zagreb, not Belgrade. We also gained their trust by accepting their gifts of Turkish coffee whenever it was offered.

The team 1SG, Steve Lamb, played a critical role in winning the support of the people in Kacanik. He went on dismounted patrols through Kacanik at least twice daily. He greeted the head doctors at the hospitals, the main bakers, and the town elders. His presence sent a feeling of security through the town. We also had an arrangement where he avoided direct contact with the UCK. The only American the UCK were to talk to was myself.

The UCK was an extremely disorganized band of unemployed young men, gun smugglers, and thieves. It did have a small number of very professional soldiers who had served in the VJ for a number of years. Yet, typically, these professional soldiers were not in charge. Most of the UCK leaders were men like Xhrabir Zharku, aka "Chorie," with whom I had to deal. Mr. Zharku got his position in the UCK for a number of reasons: he was a member of the influential Zharku clan of Kacanik; he had some form of Western education and spoke good English; his family lived comfortably as "refugees" in Sweden; he met his wife in Connecticut where he lived for a year. Most importantly, Zharku was very wealthy by Kosovar standards. Like many Kosovar Albanians, he made his money smuggling guns into Croatia and Bosnia during the war between 1991 and 1995. I did not think of him as a military *leader*; he was a cross between a politician and local strongman.

At first, I had daily meetings with Mr. Zharku in his office in the former MUP building of downtown Kacanik. These meetings produced few results. He had no desire to work with NATO or me because we were his competitors for power. He was also frustrated because we consistently demonstrated to "his" people that we were in charge and could help them in ways that he never could. The people of Kacanik *loved* my men and this seriously irked him. He consistently tried to threaten me, but would always back down when I acted tough and followed up my promise to enforce the MTA with action. My last meeting with him followed our raid on a factory that renegade UCK thugs refused to surrender. After that, he disappeared and did not resurface until we left Kacanik on 9 July.

The redeployment was as exciting as the road march into Kosovo. We were pulled out of Kacanik on 9 July and reported back to Camp Bondsteel on the 12th. After staying in Bondsteel for a day, performing maintenance and getting the wheels ready for the road march, we moved to Camp Able Sentry, Macedonia. From there we were loaded on HETS and moved to Thessalonika, Greece, to be shipped back to Bremerhaven and home.

Reflections on Kosovo

From no-notice deployment, force protection, stability operations, entry operations, and logistic support, the Flying Coyotes learned many lessons about the use of heavy armor in stability operations. The most important lessons we learned were:

Be ready: The last thing we expected was to receive a call sending us to war with less than 30 days notice. It CAN and WILL happen to you. Pretending otherwise is self-defeating.

Joint operations do work, but there are many sets of rules. Work with the other services, because working against them will shut down your operation. The C-17 is an excellent aircraft, but it takes a committed team of Air Force and Army personnel even to get you to the plane. Working through that system proved to be one of the hardest challenges of the entire deployment.

No unit that understands force protection goes anywhere without tanks. Tanks will comprise a central element in any force package for stability operations. Although we had never trained for mounted stability operations, we adjusted our METL according to the ROE and that worked effectively for our conditions.

I attended a briefing once where a Marine tanker in Somalia said that three things a tank does in war are reversed in stability ops. In high-intensity conflict, you are looking for firepower, mobility, then protection. He stated that in peace ops, these three are reversed — you desire protection, mobility, and then firepower. We will train for the next peace deployment using this axiom.

It takes the same amount of logistics support to sustain operations for one tank as it does for 14 tanks.

The Flying Coyotes were alerted for possible deployment on 1 April and deployed on 1 May. They spent one month in Albania, and another in Kosovo. They redeployed on 18 July, having never lost a man or vehicle in combat or to accidents. This is the modern face of deployments, a standard set by the Coyotes — a standard for which the entire Armor community should be forever proud.

CPT Marshall Miles graduated from USMA in 1993 with a degree in U.S. history. After AOBC he served as a platoon leader and XO with 2-8 Cav, 1CD, Ft. Hood, Texas, including two NTC deployments and one Foal Eagle deployment to Korea. In January '96, he became S3 Air for 2-8 CAV, and, in November, volunteered to participate in Operation Joint Endeavor, with assignment to Support Command under IFOR/SFOR in Zagreb, Croatia, for 12 months. He returned to 2-8 Cav and assisted in 2-8 Cav's transition to the M1A2 for his last 8 months there. After attending FAOAC and CAS3, he served as S3 Air for 1-35 Armor until his deployment to Albania on 20 May 1999.